the apocryphal wisdom of solomon

THE

APOCRYPHAL WISDOM OF SOLOMON

ANDREW HOYEM

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WISDOM OF SOLOMON

In the King James or Authorized Version of the Bible of 1611, the Apocrypha is a separate group of books bound between the Old and New Testaments. These are additional chapters to Old Testament books, whole books unto themselves, and other fragments from before the common era, or BCE, the politically correct term for before Christ. The word apocrypha means hidden or secret, implying that some scriptures were meant to be withheld from the public because of mysterious, esoteric, or possibly heretical content. Because this part of the Bible was not universally accepted as part of the Old Testament, the term apocryphal came to signify that which is of doubtful origin. Most of the Apocrypha is incorporated into the Roman Catholic Old Testament and also into the Greek and Slavonic Bibles. In addition, the Latin Vulgate placed three books of the Apocrypha in its appendix, and the last book, 4 Maccabees, appears only as an appendix to the Greek Bible.

Acceptance into the canon was more difficult for Greek texts that could not be traced to earlier Hebrew manuscripts. Martin Luther labeled the books of Greek origin the Apocrypha, as had Jerome. The Septuagint, the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek said to have been prepared by seventy-two translators in just seventy-two days, included many of the Apocryphal books, but by the end of the first century of the common era Jews began to dispute the authenticity of non-Hebrew writings. Protestants suspicious of Catholics shunned the Apocrypha, and it became both hidden and forbidden. The first American translation of the Bible by Charles Thomson from the Greek, in 1808, did not include the Apocrypha; neither did the American Standard Version, published in 1901.

For a Lutheran lad such as I, the Apocrypha was tantalizing. Away at college, I dipped into these extra-canonical books, and afterward, with time on my hands in the Navy, I determined to read them through. Of course, the story of Susanna, spied on by the elders while she bathed nude, was provocative; and exciting were Daniel's accounts of exposing the feeding of the idol Bel as fakery and causing the belly of the Dragon to burst. Little else stuck in my memory.

When my company Arion Press undertook to print a folio edition of the Bible this past year, I determined that we should print the entire text of the New Revised Standard Version, including the Apocrypha. This added to the length of the book the equivalent number of pages in the New Testament, for the Old Testament takes up about two-thirds of the Bible, while the Apocrypha and New Testament are each about one-sixth of its bulk. I decided to be one of the two persons on our proofreading team, reading aloud, from page proofs pulled from the type, to another person who follows the text of the New Revised Standard Version in a printed Bible published by Oxford or Cambridge. Over the period of about a year and a half, I shall have read aloud all 1340 pages containing the Scriptures.

During proofreading of the Apocrypha one book in particular stood out: Wisdom of Solomon. I was transfixed by its beauty as literature and its power as teaching. The aesthetic and moral strength of the original is apparent in its conveyance of ideas, descriptions of scenes, and narration of events through forms that transcend translation. Before taking up that book, I will give an overview of the Apocryphal or Deuterocanonical Books of the Bible, as they are designated in the New Revised Standard Version.

The translation, known by the acronym NRSV, is considered the most scholarly rendering of the Bible at present. It was prepared by a committee of Bible translators and scholars, sponsored by the National Council of Churches of Christ. It is an authorized revision of the Revised Standard Version, published in 1952, which had revised the American Standard Version of 1901, incorporating earlier revisions of the King James Version of 1611. After 1952, important discoveries were made that allowed new interpretations. Fresh information came from the Dead Sea Scrolls in the late forties. In the area where the scrolls were unearthed early

copies of the Hebrew Scriptures were also found. And around this time early Greek manuscript copies of New Testament books were discovered. Work on the NRSV was started in 1974 and it was published in 1989. The Apocrypha was completed after the Old and New Testaments. The committee was diligent in its accommodation of various branches of Christianity and consulted Bible authorities from Jewish and other faiths.

The committee remains under the chairmanship of Bruce M. Metzger, Professor Emeritus of New Testament Language and Literature, Princeton Theological Seminary. I have had the privilege to correspond and communicate by telephone with this distinguished scholar on textual questions as issues arose during our printing. His co-editor for the New Oxford Annotated Bible, which I have consulted for this paper, is Roland E. Murphy, also a member of the NRSV Bible Committee and Professor Emeritus of Old Testament, Duke University Divinity School. Dr. Murphy contributed to the commentary on Wisdom of Solomon. I have also used the NRSV Cambridge Annotated Study Apocrypha, edited by Howard Clark Kee.

The number and arrangement of the books of the Apocrypha in the King James version is different from the NRSV, lacking two books of Maccabees, 3 and 4, and Psalm 151, and beginning with 1 and 2 Esdras, but then the order remains the same. The NRSV begins with those books accepted into the Roman Catholic, Greek, and Slavonic Bibles: Tobit, Judith, additions to the Book of Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, the additions to the Book of Daniel (Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon), 1 and 2 Maccabees.

The second group consists of books accepted into the Greek and Slavonic Bibles but not into the Roman Catholic canon. These are: I Esdras, Prayer of Manasseh (though both of these are in the Appendix to the Latin Vulgate), Psalm 151, and 3 Maccabees.

The third section is 2 Esdras, which is in the Slavonic Bible and in the Appendix to the Latin Vulgate. The fourth section is 4 Maccabees, which is in the Appendix to the Greek Bible.

Except for 2 Esdras, the books of the Apocrypha are included in

the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament. This is the main textual source for the translation, using the edition prepared by Alfred Rahlfs, Stuttgart, 1935, and that of Joseph Ziegler for the Göttingen Septuagint of 1965. The translators also used Hebrew, Syriac, Latin, Ethiopic, Arabic, Armenian, and Georgian texts as resources.

The traditional fifteen Apocryphal Books can be classified into six literary types. The first type is Historical and includes 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, and 1 Esdras.

First and Second Maccabees tell of the liberation of the Jews of Palestine from the imposition of Hellenistic religion and culture by their Seleucid rulers. The central figure is Judas Maccabeus who reigned 165-160 BCE.

He extended the glory of his people. Like a giant he put on his breastplate; he bound on his armor of war and waged battles, protecting the camp by his sword. He was like a lion in his deeds, like a lion's cub roaring for prey. He searched out and pursued those who broke the law; he burned those who troubled his people. Lawbreakers shrank back for fear of him: all the evildoers were confounded; and deliverance prospered by his hand. He embittered many kings, but he made Jacob glad by his deeds, and his memory is blessed forever. He went through the cities of Judah; he destroyed the ungodly out of the land; thus he turned away wrath from Israel. He was renowned to the ends of the earth; he gathered in those who were perishing. 1 Maccabees, 3.3-9

The key event is the purification and rededication of the temple on Mount Zion under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus on the 25th day of the ninth month in the 148th year, celebrated at Hanukkah, the Jewish festival of rededication.

2 Maccabbees focuses on a shorter period and on the piety of the Jews compared with the wickedness of Gentiles. Its genre has been described as Pathetic Historical, because the writer uses any and all means to convince the reader of the moral implications of the events related. There is a touch of unintended humor at the conclusion.

This, then, is how matters turned out with Nicanor, and from that time the city has been in the possession of the Hebrews. So I will here end my story.

If it is well told and to the point, that is what I myself desired; if it is poorly done and mediocre, that was the best I could do. For just as it is harmful to drink wine alone, or, again, to drink water alone, while wine mixed with water is sweet and delicious and enhances one's enjoyment, so also the style of the story delights the ears of those who read the work. And here will be the end.

2 Maccabees, 15.37-39

r Esdras begins with Josiah, who was king of Judah from 639 to 609 BCE and was "upright in the sight of the Lord" but who was followed by kings who did evil. The book ends with the priest and scribe Ezra, who ended mixed marriages with the expulsion of foreign wives and their children.

The second literary type is Novelistic and includes Tobit, Judith, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon.

Tobit is an edifying novel probably written around 200 BCE, purporting to relate in the first person events five hundred years before but is presumed fictional from its historical inaccuracies. The narrative tells of Tobit, a virtuous man who is blinded as a test of his faith. As an old man his sight is restored by his son Tobias through the agency of the angel Raphael and a medicine made from fish gall. Tobit throws his arms around Tobias and says, "I see you, my son, the light of my eyes!" Raphael then discloses his identity.

"I was sent to you to test you. And at the same time God sent me to heal you and Sarah your daughter-in-law. I am Raphael, one of the seven angels who stand ready and enter before the glory of the Lord."

Judith is a romance from the first century BCE, probably before the Roman invasion of Israel in 63 BCE. In the male-dominated Jewish society it is a courageous woman who becomes the agent of God's actions. The beautiful and strong Judith remains pure in her diet and personal practices in accordance with religious law. Summoned by the Assyrian general Holofernes to a banquet, she is left alone with him afterward in his tent. Holofernes is dead drunk. Judith takes his sword, strikes his neck twice, "with all her might", and returns to her people with his head in the food bag of her maid. When the Assyrian army discovers the beheaded Holofernes it flees in panic, pursued and destroyed by the Israelites. Judith then sings a song of praise:

Begin a song to my God with tambourines, sing to my Lord with cymbals.

Raise to him a new psalm; exalt him, and call upon his name.

For the Lord is a God who crushes wars; he sets up his camp among his people; he delivered me from the hands of my pursuers.

The Assyrian came down from the mountains of the north;

he came with myriads of his warriors;
their numbers blocked up the wadis,
and their cavalry covered the hills.
He boasted that he would burn up my territory,
and kill my young men with the sword,
and dash my infants to the ground,
and seize my children as booty,
and take my virgins as spoil.

But the Lord Almighty has foiled them by the hand of a woman.

For their mighty one did not fall by the hands of the young men,
nor did the sons of the Titans strike him down,
nor did the giants set upon him;
but Judith daughter of Merari
with the beauty of her countenance undid him.

For she put away her widow's clothing to exalt the oppressed in Israel.

She anointed her face with perfume; she fastened her hair with a tiara and put on a linen gown to beguile him. Her sandal ravished his eyes, her beauty captivated his mind, and the sword severed his neck!

Judith, 16.1-9

I have already mentioned the other two books in the novelistic vein, the Hellenistic romances of Susanna and Bel and the Dragon, stories that propagandize worship, showing the pious protected by God. I do not quote from these tantalizing tales, to reserve them for your own bedtime reading.

The third literary form is Didactic, as exhibited by two books: Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus or the Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach. The description of the first of these will be reserved to later, as it is the main subject of this paper. The wisdom books or wisdom literature of the Bible are collective terms for the books of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Wisdom of Solomon, and Ecclesiasticus. Sirach, known in Semitic traditions as Ben Sira, was composed near the end of the second century BCB. The Jesus in the name of the book is not the New Testament Savior, any more than Judas of the Maccabees would be His Betrayer. Writings claiming historic persons as authors are called pseudepigrapha. In the case of the Wisdom of Solomon, Solomon is to wisdom what Moses is to law and David to psalms. Sirach praises wisdom and gives advice about wise choices in living, praises heroes of Israel for their faith, and concludes with an autobiographical poem. The Hymn in

Honor of Our Ancestors begins with a line used as the title for a book by James Agee with photographs by Walker Evans, though the wording you remember comes from the King James Version.

Let us now sing the praises of famous men, our ancestors in their generations. The Lord apportioned to them great glory, his majesty from the beginning. There were those who ruled in their kingdoms, and made a name for themselves by their valor; those who gave counsel because they were intelligent; those who spoke in prophetic oracles; those who led the people by their counsels and by their knowledge of the people's lore; they were wise in their words of instruction; those who composed musical tunes, or put verses in writing; rich men endowed with resources, living peacefully in their homesall these were honored in their generations, and were the pride of their times. Some of them have left behind a name, so that others declare their praise. But of others there is no memory; they have perished as though they had never existed: they have become as though they had never been born, they and their children after them. But these also were godly men, whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten; their wealth will remain with their descendants, and their inheritance with their children's children. Their descendants stand by the covenants; their children also, for their sake. Their offspring will continue forever,

and their glory will never be blotted out.

Their bodies are buried in peace,

but their name lives on generation after generation.

The assembly declares their wisdom,
and the congregation proclaims their praise.

Sirach, 44.1-15

The fourth literary form is Devotional, as in The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews and The Prayer of Manasseh. Azariah, earlier known as Abednego, is in the furnace with Shadrach and Meshach, where they were put by King Nebuchadnezzar, as told in the Book of Daniel. While walking around in the flames unharmed, Azariah utters this prayer to be saved by the Lord. A moist wind protects them and the three Jews then sing a song of praise, repeating: "Bless the Lord... sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever", inserting between the phrases a litany of all that should bless the Lord and be blessed by him: sun and moon, stars of heaven, rain and dew, winds, winter cold and summer heat, nights and days, light and darkness, mountains and hills, seas and rivers, whales and all that swim in the waters, birds of the air, wild animals and cattle, all people on earth.

Also in poetic verse is the Prayer of Manasseh, ascribed to the king of Judah in the seventh century BCE. God's will and strength are shown by the creation, containment of hostile forces ("who confined the deep and sealed it with your terrible and glorious name"), punishment of the wicked, and compassionate forgiveness of the faithful who repent as must King Manasseh himself.

Of the fifth literary type, Epistolatory, there is only one example: The Letter of Jeremiah, and there are no other examples of this form in the Old Testament. It is possible that the effectiveness of the personal communication of Jeremiah may have influenced New Testament writers, for 21 of its 27 books are in epistolary form. Jeremiah is writing to the people of Judah when they were about to be taken off to exile in Babylon in 597 BCE, as described in 2 Kings. He warns them about worshipping idols:

Like a scarecrow in a cucumber bed, which guards nothing, so are their gods of wood, overlaid with gold and silver. In the same way, their gods of wood, overlaid with gold and silver, are like a thornbush in a garden on which every bird perches; or like a corpse thrown out in the darkness. From the purple and linen that rot upon them you will know that they are not gods; and they will finally be consumed themselves, and be a reproach in the land.

Jeremiah, 70-72

The sixth literary type, the Apocalyptic, has a single example, 2 Esdras. Like the Apocalypse or Revelation to John of the New Testament, this book claims to reveal the future, explain mysterious numbers, describe strange beasts, and tell of angelic visitations. It is a composite of writings, dating from as late as the first century BCB. A messianic figure pre-exists, the Son of Man, the Elect One, from David, a Second Moses. Ezra is prophesying. On Mount Zion he sees in the midst of a multitude:

a young man of great stature, taller than any of the others, and on the head of each of them he placed a crown, but he was more exalted than they. And I was held spellbound. Then I asked an angel, "Who are these, my lord?" He answered and said to me, "These are they who have put off mortal clothing and have put on the immortal, and have confessed the name of God. Now they are being crowned, and receive palms." Then I said to the angel, "Who is that young man who is placing crowns on them and putting palms in their hands?" He answered and said to me, "He is the Son of God, whom they confessed in the world."

2 Esdras, 2.43-47

The angel Uriel tells Ezra the Parable of the Forest and the Sea:

"I went into a forest of trees of the plain, and they made a plan and said, 'Come, let us go and make war against the sea, so that it may recede before us and so that we may make for ourselves more forests.' In like manner the waves of the sea also made a plan and said, 'Come, let us go up and subdue the forest of the plain so that there also we may gain more territory for ourselves.' But the plan of the forest was in vain, for the fire came and consumed it; likewise also the plan of the waves of the sea was in vain, for the sand stood firm and blocked it. If now you were a judge between them, which would you undertake to justify, and which to condemn? . . . For as the land has been assigned to the forest and the sea to its waves, so also those who inhabit the earth can understand only what is on the earth, and he who is above the heavens can understand what is above the height of the heavens."

2 Esdras, 4.13-21

In addition, the NRSV Apocrypha has three non-traditional entries: The first is a Psalm, numbered 151, and in its prefatory lines it is acknowledged to be beyond the traditional and thought-to-be holy number of 150. The psalm, on the subject of David slaying Goliath, is made up of fragments of two psalms. In the first, verses 1-5, David, though the least promising of his father's sons, is selected by God; in the second, verses 6-7, the challenge from and victory over the giant are told.

I was small among my brothers,
and the youngest in my father's house;
I tended my father's sheep.
My hands made a harp;
my fingers fashioned a lyre.
And who will tell my Lord?
The Lord himself; it is he who hears.
It was he who sent his messenger
and took me from my father's sheep,
and anointed me with his anointing oil.
My brothers were handsome and tall,
but the Lord was not pleased with them.
I went out to meet the Philistine,

and he cursed me by his idols.

But I drew his own sword;

I beheaded him, and took away disgrace from the people of Israel.

The second non-traditional addition, 3 Maccabees, is a Religious Novel, which might be put with the literary form that includes Tobit and Judith. This is the story of the conflict between Ptolemy IV (221-203 BCE) and the Jews of Egypt and how the Jews were saved from trampling by elephants in the hippodrome near Alexandria through a vision of angels. Philopator, an honorific title (meaning father-loving) for that king of Egypt, arranged the destruction of the Jews by having a herd of elephants drugged with wine perfumed with frankincense so that they would run wild over the helpless Jews who had been herded into the hippodrome. The event was postponed repeatedly by the king who, in fits of forgetfulness, would fail to order the execution on the appointed day. This was the intervention of God. Just as the reader is tiring of the repetition and suspense, and the elephants are about to suffer another hangover, the old priest Eleazar says a prayer, and as he ends, the king arrives at the hippodrome,

with the animals and all the arrogance of his forces. And when the Jews observed this they raised great cries to heaven so that even the nearby valleys resounded with them and brought an uncontrollable terror upon the army. Then the most glorious, almighty, and true God revealed his holy face and opened the heavenly gates, from which two glorious angels of fearful aspect descended, visible to all but the Jews. They opposed the forces of the enemy and filled them with confusion and terror, binding them with immovable shackles. Even the king began to shudder bodily, and he forgot his sullen insolence. The animals turned back upon the armed forces following them and began trampling and destroying them.

3 Maccabees, 6.16-21

Finally, there is the Greek Philosophical Treatise of 4 Maccabees, a diatribe on reason ruling over the passions of the body and soul. The Jewish writer is influenced by Platonic and Stoic philosophy: to practice justice and virtue, to die rather than to do wrong, to be assured of future judgment and life after death for the just. Screnity is the reward to those who resist temptation and endure oppression. Moral behavior is attained through devout reason. "Courage, brother.... Bear up nobly," say the seven brothers before they are tortured to death rather than defile themselves. "For, just as the seven days of creation move in choral dance around religion, so these youths, forming a chorus, encircled the sevenfold fear of tortures and disolved it." (14.7-8) They are persuaded by their mother who, herself a martyr, follows them into the flames.

O bitter was that day—and yet not bitter—when that bitter tyrant of the Greeks quenched fire with fire in his cruel caldrons, and in his burning rage brought those seven sons of the daughter of Abraham to the catapult and back again to more tortures, pierced the pupils of their eyes and cut out their tongues, and put them to death with various tortures. For these crimes divine justice pursued and will pursue the accursed tyrant. But the sons of Abraham with their victorious mother are gathered together into the chorus of the fathers, and have received pure and immortal souls from God, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

4 Maccabees, 18.20-24

The books of the Apocrypha have had influence far greater than might be expected in liturgy, literature, and art. Shakespeare named his two daughters after heroines of the Apocrypha, Susanna and Judith. There is Longfellow's poetic dramatization of Judas Maccabaeus, and Handel's oratorio of the same name. Museums of art contain many works inspired by incidents from the Apocrypha, such as the decapitation of Holofernes by Judith in Caravaggio's painting of 1599 and Rembrandt's of Susanna and the Elders of 1634.

A most astounding influence comes from the Wisdom of Solomon, and here I quote Dr. Murphy, then the passage:

Strange as it may seem, ideas included in the Christian hymn, "It came upon the Midnight Clear", are traceable to the Old Testament Apocrypha. In the New Testament accounts of the Nativity, nothing is said of the exact time of Jesus' birth. The subsequent identification of the hour of his birth as midnight is doubtless due to the influence of a remarkable passage in the Wisdom of Solomon. At an early century in the Christian era the imagination of more than one Church Father was caught by pseudo-Solomon's vivid reference to a time when God's "all-powerful word [the Logos] leapt from heaven, from the royal throne", namely when "night in its swift course was now half gone" (18.14-15). Despite the context of the passage, which speaks of the destruction of the first-born Egyptians at the time of the Exodus, the words were interpreted as referring to the Incarnation of the eternal Word of God, Jesus Christ. Thus by a curious, not to say ironical, twist of fortune, a passage that tells of a stern warrior with a sharp sword filling a doomed land with death has had a share in fixing popular traditions concerning the time and circumstances of the birth of the Prince of Peace.

For while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, your all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne,

into the midst of the land that was doomed, a stern warrior

carrying the sharp sword of your authentic command, and stood and filled all things with death, and touched heaven while standing on the earth.

18.14-16

In the second century Christians, as their Jewish predecessors, had to deal with claims of provenance, needing to decide among the many writings that were said to have come directly from the Apostles. An eighth century manuscript, the Muratorian Canon, discovered in Milan in 1740, listing books in use in Rome circa 200 CE, includes the Wisdom of Solomon in the New Testament, about the time that term was first used. From its Stoic and Middle-Platonic philosophical vocabulary, the book could have been written during the hundred years before or after the birth of Christ. Evidence of its vocabulary ties it to the Greco-Roman world of the first centuries BCE and CE, a hinge in history. Though the book is ascribed to Solomon, his name is not in it. The author was probably a Hellenistic Jew, writing in Greek, at Alexandria, in the latter part of the first century BCE. The four cardinal virtues (8.7) are cited and the knowledge of God is conveyed in philosophical terms (13.1-9), which places the book within Hellenistic culture, however with a strong Jewish strain, emulating the Septuagint for wording of passages.

Wisdom is portrayed as a goddess, just as Athena for the Greeks and Minerva for the Romans were divine women of wisdom. The concept of Lady Wisdom appears earlier in the Old Testament. In

Proverbs 8 she tells of her divine origin:

"To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all that live.
O simple ones, learn prudence;
acquire intelligence, you who lack it.
Hear, for I will speak noble things,
and from my lips will come what is right;
for my mouth will utter truth;
wickedness is an abomination to my lips.

Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.... The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.

Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth... when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was his daily delight, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

Proverbs, 8.4-31

In Proverbs 9: "Wisdom has built her house,/she has hewn her seven pillars." The notion of wisdom as female recurs in the New Testament. In Matthew 11.19: "Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds [or children]." And in 12.42: "The queen of the South [Sheba] will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here!"

In Wisdom of Solomon, she is divine but dispersible, a figure who may sit beside God but also pervades the ether, surrounding the living and dispensing herself into those who are or would be wise. She is a mystical perception, like the Egyptian god Isis, who mediates between humans and the gods. In Middle Platonic terms, she is an intermediator necessary for humans to understand divine order. The Stoic writers along, with Jewish apocalyptic authors, held that humans are accountable for their thoughts and actions to God's judgment and that the righteous will be rewarded and live on, whereas the wicked will be punished and destroyed. Wisdom of Solomon follows the literary model of the Hellenistic protrepticos, a didactic exhortation.

The book has two parts. The first, in chapters 1-9, contrasts the righteous and the wicked, asserting the gift of immortality for the righteous, a concept that is a breakthrough in Biblical thought, and enumerates the glories of wisdom. The second part, in chapters 10-19, summarizes the role of Wisdom from Adam to Moses, then relates the history of the Israelites from the Egyptian oppression to the settlement in Canaan, with digressions on God's power and

mercy and on the folly of idolatry, and concludes with God as the "author of beauty" who protects and preserves his people.

The venerable Eleventh Edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica states that Wisdom of Solomon is "the most brilliant production of pre-Christian Hebrew philosophical thought, remarkable both for its ideas and for the splendor of its diction." I hope that appraisal is apparent from the following selections and comments.

The book opens with an exhortation to wisdom and righteous-

ness, appealing especially to those who govern.

Love righteousness, you rulers of the earth, think of the Lord in goodness and seek him with sincerity of heart; because he is found by those who do not put him to the test,

and manifests himself to those who do not distrust him.

For perverse thoughts separate people from God, and when his power is tested, it exposes the foolish; because wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul, or dwell in a body enslaved to sin.

For a holy and disciplined spirit will flee from deceit, and will leave foolish thoughts behind, and will be ashamed at the approach of unrighteousness.

1.1-5

Do not invite death by the error of your life, or bring on destruction by the works of your hands; because God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he created all things so that they might exist; the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them, and the dominion of Hades is not on earth. For righteousness is immortal.

1.12-15

Then the ungodly speak, claiming that death is the absolute termination of life, birth is an accident, hedonism and exploitation of the weak are acceptable behavior.

"Short and sorrowful is our life,
and there is no remedy when a life comes to its end,
and no one has been known to return from Hades.
For we were born by mere chance,
and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been,
for the breath in our nostrils is smoke,
and reason is a spark kindled by the beating of our
hearts;

when it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes, and the spirit will dissolve like empty air.

Our name will be forgotten in time, and no one will remember our works; our life will pass away like the traces of a cloud, and be scattered like mist that is chased by the rays of the sun and overcome by its heat.

For our allotted time is the passing of a shadow, and there is no returning from our death, because it is sealed up and no one turns back.

"Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that exist, and make use of the creation to the full as in youth. Let us take our fill of costly wine and perfumes, and let no flower of spring pass us by.

Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither....

Let us oppress the righteous poor man; let us not spare the widow or regard the gray hairs of the aged. But let our might be our law of right, for what is weak proves itself to be useless."

2.I-II

The wicked do not recognize that they are created in God's image.

Thus they reasoned, but they were led astray, for their wickedness blinded them, and they did not know the secret purposes of God, nor hoped for the wages of holiness, nor discerned the prize for blameless souls; for God created us for incorruption, and made us in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it.

2.21-24

The righteous seem to die, yet are at peace, knowing divine truth.

But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them.

In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace.

For though in the sight of others they were punished, their hope is full of immortality.

Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good,

because God tested them and found them worthy of himself;

like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them. In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble. They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever. Those who trust in him will understand truth, and the faithful will abide with him in love, because grace and mercy are upon his holy ones

3.1-9

At the Final Judgment the wicked will recognize the error of their ways and witness the triumph of the righteous.

They will come with dread when their sins are reckoned up,

and their lawless deeds will convict them to their face.

Then the righteous will stand with great confidence in the presence of those who have oppressed them and those who make light of their labors.

When the unrighteous see them, they will be shaken with dreadful fear,

and they will be amazed at the unexpected salvation of the righteous.

They will speak to one another in repentance, and in anguish of spirit they will groan, and say, "These are persons whom we once held in derision and made a byword of reproach—fools that we were! We thought that their lives were madness and that their end was without honor.

Why have they been numbered among the children of God?

And why is their lot among the saints?

So it was we who strayed from the way of truth, and the light of righteousness did not shine on us, and the sun did not rise upon us.

We took our fill of the paths of lawlessness and destruction,

and we journeyed through trackless deserts, but the way of the Lord we have not known. What has our arrogance profited us? And what good has our boasted wealth brought us?

"All those things have vanished like a shadow, and like a rumor that passes by; like a ship that sails through the billowy water, and when it has passed no trace can be found,

no track of its keel through the waves; or as, when a bird flies through the air, no evidence of its passage is found; the light air, lashed by the beat of its pinions and pierced by the force of its rushing flight, is traversed by the movement of its wings, and afterward no sign of its coming is found there; or as, when an arrow is shot at a target, the air, thus divided, comes together at once, so that no one knows its pathway. So we also, as soon as we were born, ceased to be, and we had no sign of virtue to show, but were consumed in our wickedness." Because the hope of the ungodly is like thistledown carried by the wind, and like a light frost driven away by a storm; it is dispersed like smoke before the wind, and it passes like the remembrance of a guest who stays

But the righteous live forever,
and their reward is with the Lord;
the Most High takes care of them.
Therefore they will receive a glorious crown
and a beautiful diadem from the hand of the Lord,
because with his right hand he will cover them,
and with his arm he will shield them.
The Lord will take his zeal as his whole armor,
and will arm all creation to repel his enemies;
he will put on righteousness as a breastplate,
and wear impartial justice as a helmet;
he will take holiness as an invincible shield,
and sharpen stern wrath for a sword,
and creation will join with him to fight against his
frenzied foes.

but a day.

well-drawn bow, and hailstones full of wrath will be hurled as from a catapult;

the water of the sea will rage against them, and rivers will relentlessly overwhelm them; a mighty wind will rise against them, and like a tempest it will winnow them away. Lawlessness will lay waste the whole earth, and evildoing will overturn the thrones of rulers.

4.20, 5.1-23

The narrator urges kings to heed his words and seek wisdom, for God will hold rulers accountable. Then he describes Wisdom.

Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her. She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her.

One who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty, for she will be found sitting at the gate.

To fix one's thought on her is perfect understanding,

To fix one's thought on her is perfect understanding and one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from care,

because she goes about seeking those worthy of her, and she graciously appears to them in their paths, and meets them in every thought.

The beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction,

and concern for instruction is love of her, and love of her is the keeping of her laws, and giving heed to her laws is the assurance of immortality,

and immortality brings one near to God; so the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom.

6.12-20

Not only kings, but every individual must gain wisdom and will be judged. Here the narrator admits that he is human, with common limitations imposed by conception, birth, infancy, and death.

I also am mortal, like everyone else, a descendant of the first-formed child of earth; and in the womb of a mother I was molded into flesh, within the period of ten months, compacted with blood,

from the seed of a man and the pleasure of marriage.

And when I was born, I began to breathe the common air.

and fell upon the kindred earth;
my first sound was a cry, as is true of all.
I was nursed with care in swaddling cloths.
For no king has had a different beginning of existence;
there is for all one entrance into life, and one way out.

7.1-6

For Pseudo-Solomon, wisdom is God's gift in answer to his prayer.

Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me; I called on God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me. I preferred her to scepters and thrones, and I accounted wealth as nothing in comparison with her.

Neither did I liken to her any priceless gem, because all gold is but a little sand in her sight, and silver will be accounted as clay before her. I loved her more than health and beauty, and I chose to have her rather than light, because her radiance never ceases. All good things came to me along with her, and in her hands uncounted wealth. I rejoiced in them all, because wisdom leads them; but I did not know that she was their mother. I learned without guile and I impart without grudging;

I do not hide her wealth, for it is an unfailing treasure for mortals; those who get it obtain friendship with God, commended for the gifts that come from instruction.

7.7-14

To Wisdom are ascribed twenty-one qualities. Furthermore, she is a breath, an emanation, a reflection, a mirror, an image of God.

There is in her a spirit that is intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, mobile, clear, unpolluted, distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen, irresistible, beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, free from anxiety, all-powerful, overseeing all, and penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent, pure, and altogether subtle. For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things.

For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness.

Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.

She is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars.

Compared with the light she is found to be superior,

for it is succeeded by the night,
but against wisdom evil does not prevail.
She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to
the other,
and she orders all things well.

7.22-8.1

She is portrayed as a bride, in resemblance to the Greco-Roman mysteries and the cult of Isis.

I loved her and sought her from my youth;
I desired to take her for my bride,
and became enamored of her beauty.
She glorifies her noble birth by living with God,
and the Lord of all loves her.
For she is an initiate in the knowledge of God,
and an associate in his works.
If riches are a desirable possession in life,
what is richer than wisdom, the active cause of all
things?

And if understanding is effective,
who more than she is fashioner of what exists?
And if anyone loves righteousness,
her labors are virtues;
for she teaches self-control and prudence,
justice and courage;
nothing in life is more profitable for mortals than
these.

And if anyone longs for wide experience, she knows the things of old, and infers the things to come;

she understands turns of speech and the solutions of riddles;

she has foreknowledge of signs and wonders and of the outcome of seasons and times.

Therefore I determined to take her to live with me,

knowing that she would give me good counsel and encouragement in cares and grief.

Because of her I shall have glory among the multitudes and honor in the presence of the elders, though I am young.

. . .

When I enter my house, I shall find rest with her; for companionship with her has no bitterness, and life with her has no pain, but gladness and joy. When I considered these things inwardly, and pondered in my heart that in kinship with wisdom there is immortality, and in friendship with her, pure delight, and in the labors of her hands, unfailing wealth, and in the experience of her company, understanding, and renown in sharing her words, I went about seeking how to get her for myself. As a child I was naturally gifted, and a good soul fell to my lot; or rather, being good, I entered an undefiled body. But I perceived that I would not possess wisdom unless God gave her to meand it was a mark of insight to know whose gift she

8.1-21

The writer as Solomon prays for wisdom to compensate for human failings, to understand God's will and the nature of heaven and earth, and to bring about justice and obedience.

so I appealed to the Lord and implored him. . . .

With you is wisdom, she who knows your works and was present when you made the world; she understands what is pleasing in your sight and what is right according to your commandments. Send her forth from the holy heavens, and from the throne of your glory send her,

that she may labor at my side, and that I may learn what is pleasing to you. For she knows and understands all things, and she will guide me wisely in my actions and guard me with her glory.

9.9-11

The balance of the book describes the agency of Wisdom during the history of God's people as related in the Five Books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy). The punishment of the wicked is detailed in the plagues visited on the Egyptians. Note the line that has us receiving punishment from our sins as well as for them.

In return for their foolish and wicked thoughts, Which led them astray to worship irrational serpents and worthless animals,

you sent upon them a multitude of irrational creatures to punish them,

so that they might learn that one is punished by the very things by which one sins.

For your all-powerful hand,

which created the world out of formless matter,

did not lack the means to send upon them a multitude

of bears, or bold lions, or newly created unknown beasts full of rage,

or such as breathe out fiery breath,

or belch forth a thick pall of smoke,

or flash terrible sparks from their eyes;

not only could the harm they did destroy people,

but the mere sight of them could kill by fright.

Even apart from these, people could fall at a single breath

when pursued by justice

and scattered by the breath of your power.

But you have arranged all things by measure and number and weight.

11.15-20

The narrative is interrupted for an excursus on God's power and mercy.

For it is always in your power to show great strength, and who can withstand the might of your arm?

Because the whole world before you is like a speck that tips the scales,

and like a drop of morning dew that falls on the ground.

But you are merciful to all, for you can do all things, and you overlook people's sins, so that they may repent.

For you love all things that exist,

and detest none of the things that you have made, for you would not have made anything if you had hated it.

How would anything have endured if you had not willed it?

Or how would anything not called forth by you have been preserved?

You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you who love the living.

For your immortal spirit is in all things.

Therefore you correct little by little those who trespass,

and you remind and warn them of the things through which they sin,

so that they may be freed from wickedness and put their trust in you, O Lord.

11.21-12.2

A second excursus intervenes, on the foolishness of idolatry, teaching that objects made with human hands are powerless. One of the examples is of a navigator praying to an idol.

Again, one preparing to sail and about to voyage over raging waves

calls upon a piece of wood more fragile than the ship that carries him.

For it was desire for gain that planned that vessel, and wisdom was the artisan who built it; but it is your providence, O Father, that steers its

course,

because you have given it a path in the sea,

and a safe way through the waves, showing that you can save from every danger,

so that even a person who lacks skill may put to sea.

It is your will that works of your wisdom should not be without effect;

therefore people trust their lives even to the smallest piece of wood,

and passing through the billows on a raft they come safely to land.

For even in the beginning, when arrogant giants were perishing,

the hope of the world took refuge on a raft, and guided by your hand left to the world the seed of a new generation.

14.1-6

At the end of the book, new harmony in nature is seen. The actions of God, creating, sustaining the universe, guiding his people, transform the order of world and the life of Israel.

For the elements changed places with one another, as on a harp the notes vary the nature of the rhythm, while each note remains the same.

This may be clearly inferred from the sight of what took place.

For land animals were transformed into water creatures,

and creatures that swim moved over to the land. Fire even in water retained its normal power, and water forgot its fire-quenching nature. Flames, on the contrary, failed to consume the flesh of perishable creatures that walked among them

nor did they melt the crystalline, quick-melting kind of heavenly food.

For in everything, O Lord, you have exalted and glorified your people,

and you have not neglected to help them at all times and in all places.

19.18-22

To compare with the King James Version, here is the same passage in Elizabethan English.

For the elements were changed in themselves by a kind of harmony, like as in a psaltery notes change the name of the tune, and yet are always sounds; which may well be perceived by the sight of the things that have been done. For earthly things were turned into watery, and the things, that before swam in the water, now went upon the ground. The fire had power in the water, forgetting his own virtue; and the water forgat his own quenching nature. On the other side, the flames wasted not the flesh of the corruptible living things, though they walked therein; neither melted they the icy kind of heavenly meat, that was of nature apt to melt. For in all things, O Lord, thou didst magnify thy people, and glorify them, neither didst thou lightly regard them: but didst assist them in every time and place.

The literary virtues of both are apparent, as is the greater clarity of meaning in the modern rendering. Language changes. The present is well represented against the past and our language is well served for now and the near future by the New Revised Standard Version.

Here ends the reading of lessons from the Apocrypha.

